

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 8244

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: BRRA EEWT EGEN PFOR

SUBJ: VISIT OF AMERICAN CITIZEN TO HANOI

REF: HONG KONG 7262

1. SAUBOLLE CAME IN JULY 17 TO DISCUSS HIS VISIT TO HANOI. MOST OF WHAT HE HAD TO SAY IS NOT PERISHABLE AND WILL BE FORWARDED BY MEMCON OR SEPTTEL. SAUBOLLE ALSO GAVE EXTENSIVE INTERVIEW TO FAR EAST ECONOMIC REVIEW WHICH WAS CARRIED IN TODAY'S JULY 25 ISSUE. HOWEVER, A FEW COMMENTS ON HIS DISCUSSIONS IN HANOI MIGHT BE HELPFUL.

2. SAUBOLLE WAS IMPRESSED BY THE SINCERITY AND VIGOR WITH WHICH THE VIETNAMESE STRESSED THEIR INDEPENDENCE FROM BOTH "BIG BROTHERS". IT WAS ALSO CLEAR TO HIM THAT IF FORCED TO CHOSE BETWEEN THEM, THE VIETNAMESE WOULD INCLINE TOWARDS THE SOVIETS. BOTH POINTS WERE REITERATED IN VARIOUS WAYS THROUGH OUT HIS VISIT.

3. SAUBOLLE ALSO WAS CONVINCED THE VIETNAMESE WERE FACING ENORMOUS ECONOMIC AND MORALE DIFFICULTIES AND WERE DESPERATELY TRYING TO ESTABLISH TRADE (AND AID) RELATIONS WITH THE WEST, PARTICULARLY IN THIS CASE, WITH THE UNITED STATES. THIS WAS EVIDENT IN THEIR WELL-ORGANIZED DISCUSSIONS OF TRADE AND BANKING OPPORTUNITIES AND ASPIRATIONS, AS WELL AS IN THE METICULOUS CARE WITH WHICH THE AVOIDED EMBARRASSING SITUATIONS AND POLEMICAL REFERENCES TO THE WAR.

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4. WE HAVE BEEN AWARE OF THESE THINGS ALL ALONG OF COURSE; WHAT IS INTERESTING IS THE NORTH VIETNAMESE CHOICE OF SAUBOLLE TO BE THE FIRST AMERICAN BANKER TO GO TO HANOI IN 22 YEARS. FOR THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS SAUBOLLE HAS TAKEN THE LEAD IN THE AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS IN HONG KONG IN PIONEERING US TRADE WITH CHINA AND HE HAS A CERTAIN REPUTATION WITH PRC OFFICIALS IN THIS RESPECT. IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE, THEREFORE, THAT THE DRV CHOSE HIM IN THE HOPE THAT HE COULD PLAY A SIMILAR ROLE WITH THEM. IN FACT DURING THE FINAL MEETING WITH HIM, THE VIETNAMESE INVITED HIM TO COME AGAIN AND INDICATED THAT HE WOULD BE GLAD TO CONSIDER ANOTHER TRIP IN THE WINTER BETWEEN DECEMBER AND FEBRUARY.

5. IF FOR ANY REASON THE DEPARTMENT WISHES TO GIVE SOME MODEST ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE VIETNAMESE, EITHER TO MAINTAIN THEIR INDEPENDENCE FROM THE SOVIETS AND CHINESE OR TOWARDS GOOD BEHAVIOIR IN SEA, SAUBOLLE'S VISIT MIGHT BE AN UNEXCITING PEG. OUR SIGNAL COULD BE SOME SUBTLE BUT DISTINCT RELAXATION OF OUR EMBARGO SUCH AS THAT SUGGESTED BY SINGAPORE FOR SALE OF OIL (SINGAPORE 2886) OR ALLOWING DRV ELEMENTS TO PURCHASE US COTTON DIRECTLY WHICH THEY HAD MENTIONED TO SAUBOLLE THEY WOULD LIKE TO DO. ANY SUCH RELAXATION COULD BE CONVEYED TO THE VIETNAMESE AS A SIGN OF US WILLINGNESS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS BY SAUBOLLE AT HIS WINTER VISIT OR EARLIER, IF DESIRABLE, BY SAUBOLLE TO DRV TRADE REPRESENTATIVE IN HONG KONG WHO WAS INTIAL GO-BETWEEN IN ARRANGING SAUBOLLE'S VISIT TO HANOI. WE ARE NOT, OF COURSE, ADVOCATING THAT SAUBOLLE SERVE AS A GO-BETWEEN OR PLAY ANY EXPANDED ROLE (PRESS PUBLICITY RULES THAT OUT ANYWAY), BUT THAT HIS RECENT TRIP COULD BE USED AS AN OPENING STEP.
CROSS

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